

ARTICLE APPEARED
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RICHMOND NEWS-LEADER (VA)
22 February 1983

Lawler murder suspect faces trial as adult

By FRANK DONNELLY

A 17-year-old youth who is charged with murdering former Richmond City Councilman J. Edward Lawler will be tried as an adult, a judge ruled today.

Murder and robbery charges against the youth, John Ballard, were certified today to a Richmond Circuit Court, Division II, grand jury.

Three other people, one of them Ballard's sister, also are charged with the beating death of Lawler. Police have said they believe Ballard was the person who actually struck Lawler.

Reporters were excluded from Ballard's preliminary hearing today in Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court because of Ballard's age.

After the hearing, Richmond Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Warren B. Von Schuch said little new information was revealed during the 2½-hour hearing.

Most of the hearing involved determination of probable cause and whether Ballard should be tried as a juvenile or an adult, Von Schuch said. He would not comment on any information that might have been revealed during the hearing.

Two detectives, one from Richmond and one from Florida, and a psychiatrist who examined Ballard testified during the hearing.

Part of the hearing involved a statement that Ballard gave to Richmond Detective James S. Gaudet after the youth's arrest, Von Schuch said.

Defense Attorney Sterling H. Moore objected to the statement because Ballard was not represented by an attorney when he gave it. In Florida, police said, Ballard had signed a form saying that he wanted to be represented by an attorney while being interviewed by police.

Von Schuch contended today that the form was not valid in Richmond, where Ballard was interviewed, according to a source close to the case.

Judge Alton E. Bryant Jr. did not change Ballard's bond, which is \$100,000. Ballard, of the 400 block LaSalle Drive, is being held in Henrico County Jail.

Also charged with capital murder and robbery in the case are Juanita M. Ballard, 18, also of the 400 block LaSalle Drive; Carl G. Simons, 25, of Rt. 2, Powhatan; and Timothy N. Dickenson, 20, of the 200 block Jefferson Village Drive.

Those three defendants, who are being

held in Richmond City Jail, were to appear this afternoon for a preliminary hearing in Richmond General District Court, Manchester Division.

The body of Lawler, 74, was discovered in the kitchen of his home at 5011 Riverside Drive on Dec. 31. His head had been struck repeatedly with a blunt instrument, which police have said they believe was a pair of bolt cutters.

Police have said they believe Juanita Ballard visited Lawler and somehow set him up for a robbery.

Lawler, who served on council from 1956 until 1960, was a lawyer. He once was a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation and said he operated a front here for the Central Intelligence Agency.